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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001712

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BRUCE NEULING  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE  
AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV KPAO ZI

SUBJECT: PUBLISHER TREVOR NCUBE ON MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AND PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

REF: HARARE 01692

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

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Summary  
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¶1. In a December 15 meeting, Trevor Ncube, publisher of The Independent and The Standard (as well as the Mail and Guardian in South Africa) told the Ambassador about his successful legal efforts to get back his passport (reftel). Ncube added that the GOZ was determined to curb the independent press but that its propaganda machine had become increasingly ineffective. He said the CIO and other &securicrats<sup>8</sup> were running the country but had no solutions and knew their time in power was short. They were out to steal as much as possible and were prepared to do whatever it took to stay in power as long as possible. He said the Ambassador's November speech in Mutare had exposed their activities, which is why the GOZ had reacted with such fury. The Ambassador responded that it was important to make clear to senior GOZ officials that they would ultimately be held accountable. End Summary.

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A Weakened GOZ Propaganda Machine  
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¶2. (C) Ncube told the Ambassador that circulation was down and that his papers were no longer profitable. However, he was committed to helping maintain an independent media in Zimbabwe. He said he had been told by a source in the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) that the real target of the passport seizures was the independent media, which the government was determined to crack down on. Ncube confirmed that many journalists already practiced some self-censorship and that the passport seizures could have a &chilling effect.<sup>8</sup>

¶3. (C) However, Ncube said two factors were working in favor of the independent media. The first was the courage of the young journalists on the staffs of his newspapers, who were determined to expose government wrong doing despite the risks. The second was the weakness of the current leadership of the GOZ's propaganda machine, whom Ncube called clowns and bozos, especially in comparison to the clever if unscrupulous Jonathan Moyo. Ncube said George Charamba and the other leaders lacked sophistication, as had been evident in their response to the Ambassador's speech. In their fury, they had actually ensured that most Zimbabweans would hear of the speech, rather than 200 students in Mutare. The Ambassador responded that he had counted on just this sort of reaction to get our message out.

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A Weak, Divided and Corrupt Government  
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¶4. (C) Ncube said the government had reacted with such fury to the speech because the Ambassador had told the truth about what was really happening in the country. The CIO and other &securicrats<sup>8</sup> were in charge of the country and were in the process of destroying it. No one in the GOZ was looking at the &big picture.<sup>8</sup> They had no solutions to the country's continuing economic decline but were instead intent on stealing as much as possible while in power and were prepared to kill to keep the gravy flowing. In that regard, Ncube noted that for the first time he had felt real fear and insecurity in Zimbabwe when his passport was seized.

¶5. (C) However, Ncube said the CIO, like the rest of ZANU-PF, was split over the succession issue between supporters of the Mujurus and supporters of Emmerson Mnangagwa. Ncube added that the CIO as a whole hated the Intelligence Minister, Didymus Mutasa, and that morale was increasingly low within the organization. The Ambassador, noting that morale was also supposedly low within the military and the police, asked how much longer the government could last. Ncube responded that the &tipping point<sup>8</sup> was coming. Sooner or later the country would erupt, either as a result of shortages, such as

food or water, or inflation and economic decline, or some other factor. The only thing lacking now was a spark.

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Holding the GOZ Accountable  
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16. (C) Ncube said, however, that the opposition MDC was also weak and divided and would be unable to control a spontaneous uprising. He feared the consequences of such an event, which could be used as an excuse by the military or the CIO to take power in their own right. Paradoxically, Mugabe provided stability of sorts and his sudden death could destabilize the country and produce a similar result. In that regard, Ncube noted that for the first time military names were being mentioned as potential successors to Mugabe.

17. (C) The Ambassador responded that the international community would not be prepared to reengage with a successor implicated in the crimes of the Mugabe regime. Many of the senior GOZ officials would have to go before the IMF and other IFIs would be allowed to provide the balance of payments support Zimbabwe would need to revive its economy. Ncube agreed but noted that Zimbabweans would have to do more than rely on the international community to hold the current regime accountable.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Ncube,s views track with many other Zimbabweans with whom we have talked in recent weeks. The GOZ has no solutions to the country,s problems and its major players are consumed with advancing their own personal interests. There is a palpable sense that the post-Mugabe period has already begun. In this fin-de-regime atmosphere, it is essential that the international community as a whole stress the inevitability of an accounting. This is the best means we have at the moment to influence and moderate the behavior of senior GOZ leadership.

Dell#  
DELL